

When God Is All You Have Left

1 Samuel 29:1–30:7

A Sermon on Crisis, Loss, and the Sufficiency of God

April 12, 2026

Introduction

I want to begin this morning by asking you to imagine a day. Not a bad day — not the kind where your coffee spills or your meeting runs long or your plans fall through. I want you to imagine the worst day. The day when everything you have built your life around collapses at the same time.

Your job is gone. Not downsized, not restructured — gone. The place you call home is destroyed. Your family has been taken from you, and you do not know if you will ever see them again. You have wept until your body physically cannot produce any more tears. And then the people closest to you in the world — the people you have led, protected, sacrificed for, the people who owe you everything — turn on you. They are not just angry. They are not just disappointed. They are talking about killing you.

That is not a hypothetical. That is a Tuesday in the life of David.

We are in 1 Samuel 29 and 30 this morning, and these two chapters contain one of the most dramatic sequences in all of Scripture. But to understand what is happening when chapter 29 opens, we need to zoom out and see two storylines that have been running simultaneously — and are now about to collide.

Take a look at this picture.



I want you to see the world David is living in right now.

On the left, down in the corner — that's David. He's in Ziklag, deep in the south, with his 600 men. He is living in enemy territory. He does not belong here. But he ran here because he was afraid of the man on the right — King Saul, with the army of Israel behind him.

And up in the middle — that's Achish, king of Gath. He is David's landlord, his employer, and his protector. David works for this man. David has convinced this man that he has turned his back on Israel for good.

For months, David has been living a double life. Back in chapter 27, he made a fear-driven decision without consulting God. He looked at Saul's relentless pursuit and concluded, **“I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should escape to the land of the Philistines.”** So he fled to Achish, king of Gath — the same Philistine king he had once faked madness before to escape — and this time Achish received him. David settled in Ziklag with his 600 men and their families. From there, David conducted raids against Israel's ancient enemies — the Geshurites, the Girzites, the Amalekites — while telling Achish he was raiding Israelite territory. He left no survivors from his raids so that no one could contradict the lie. Achish was completely deceived.

Meanwhile, the Philistines are mobilizing for war against Israel. Not a border skirmish. Not a regional raid. A full-scale national assault. The Philistine army gathers at Aphek, a staging ground in the north. Saul and the Israelite army are camped at the spring of Jezreel. The geography tells the story: the Philistines have pushed deep into Israelite territory. This is not a defensive engagement. They intend to crush Israel.

And Saul is falling apart. Chapter 28 gives us one of the darkest scenes in the Old Testament. Saul sees the Philistine army and is terrified. He inquires of the Lord, but God does not answer — not by dreams, not by Urim, not by prophets. The silence is total. In desperation, Saul disguises himself and travels at night to visit a medium. Now, a medium was someone who claimed to communicate with the dead — a practitioner of the occult, a person who trafficked in the spirit world outside of God's authority. This was not a gray area in Israel. The Torah explicitly forbade it. Deuteronomy 18 lists mediums among the “abominable practices” of the nations and commands Israel to have nothing to do with them. Saul himself had previously

expelled mediums from the land. He knew exactly what he was doing. And he did it anyway.

So, he disguises himself and travels at night to visit a medium at Endor — a small village behind enemy lines. Think about that: the king of Israel, sneaking through Philistine territory in civilian clothes, to break his own law. He arrives at Endor and asks the medium to summon Samuel from the dead.

The spirit of Samuel rises. And Samuel is not pleased. **“Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?”** The message is devastating in its completeness: God has departed from Saul and become his adversary. The kingdom has been given to David. And the verdict is irreversible: **“Tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me.”** Saul collapses on the ground, full length, with no strength left in him. He has received his death sentence from the ghost of the man who first anointed him king.

So as chapter 29 opens, two futures are converging on the same battlefield. Saul is marching toward his death at Mount Gilboa, emptied of hope, cut off from God, walking under a prophetic sentence of destruction. David is marching in the opposite direction — northward with the Philistine army, positioned in the rear guard alongside Achish, heading straight into a catastrophic moral dilemma.

Because here is David’s impossible situation:

- if the battle happens and David fights alongside the Philistines, he will be fighting against his own people Israel — the very nation he is anointed to rule. He will potentially be complicit in the death of Saul and Jonathan. His future kingship will be permanently stained.
- But if he refuses to fight or turns against the Philistines mid-battle, Achish will know he has been deceived, and David and his men will be caught between two hostile armies with no way out.

David has no good option. So here is the situation. David is caught between three worlds. He belongs to Israel, but he cannot go home because Saul wants him dead. He is pretending to serve Philistia, but he is lying to the king who trusts him. And he is raiding the Amalekites from Ziklag — the very people who are about to burn Ziklag to the ground.

He has maneuvered himself — through months of deception and a decision made in fear — into a corner with no visible exit.

That is where our text begins. And over the next two chapters, the narrator is going to tell us a remarkable story, where we see David being stripped of every source of human strength — one layer at a time — until there is nothing left except God.

Let's walk through it together.

The Narrowing

David loses his position (29:1–11)

The first thing taken from David is his place. He has a defined role in the Philistine world. He is Achish's bodyguard, a trusted military leader marching with a massive army toward a decisive battle. It is a compromised position, built entirely on deception, but it is a position. It gives him standing, protection, a clear daily purpose, and identity.

When the Philistine commanders see David's men in the rear guard, they are furious. **“What are these Hebrews doing here?”** The word “Hebrews” is itself dismissive — it is the outsider label, the way Philistines refer to Israelites with ethnic contempt. No matter how long David has served, he is still the foreigner. The commanders demand his removal.

Achish defends David — three times, in fact. He calls him blameless, says he has found no fault in him, even compares him to an angel of God. But the commanders overrule their own king. They demand David be sent back, fearing he will turn on them in battle. And they cite the old song: **“Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands.”** The reputation David earned fighting *against* Philistines is now being used as evidence against him *among* Philistines. His past is catching up to his present.

David responds in protests — **“But what have I done? What have you found in your servant?”** — but the decision is final. Achish sends him away peaceably, and David begins the three-day march south.

David wakes up that morning as a military leader marching with a massive army. By midday he is walking the other direction, stripped of his role and his relevance. He is a warrior without a war, a leader without a context, a man with no clear next step.

Now, you may not be a military commander. But you know what it feels like to lose your place. Maybe you walked into the office on a Monday and walked out with a box

by noon. Maybe your children have all grown up and moved away and your role as mom or dad is no longer necessary. Maybe you retired and suddenly realized that your identity was wrapped up in a title that no longer belongs to you. Maybe you are a student and the school you worked so hard to get into is not working out. When your position disappears, so does the structure that told you who you were each morning. And in that silence, you start to wonder: who am I without that role?

That is the first layer removed. David still has his home. He still has his family. He still has his men. He still has himself. But his position — the external structure that defined his daily life — is gone.

David loses his home (30:1–3a)

The three-day march from Aphek to Ziklag would have been exhausting but routine. David and his men had made long treks before. Perhaps they talked about what they would do when they got home. Perhaps they looked forward to seeing their families after the weeks away. But when they crested the final hill and looked down at Ziklag, they did not see home. They saw smoke.

“The Amalekites had made a raid against the Negeb and against Ziklag. They had overcome Ziklag and burned it with fire.”

The text is blunt. No foreshadowing, no gradual reveal. The narrator states the devastation flatly, the way catastrophe actually arrives in real life — without warning, without preparation, without the courtesy of a transition. One sentence David is marching home. The next sentence his home no longer exists. **David loses his home.**

Ziklag was not just a city. It was the one stable thing David had been given during his years of exile. Saul had chased him through the wilderness of Judah, through caves and deserts and foreign courts. Ziklag was where David could finally stop running. Achish had given it to him as a personal grant. It was David’s base of operations, the place where his men settled their families, the closest thing to permanence he had known since fleeing Saul’s court. Now it is ash. The refuge David built apart from God’s direction has been reduced to smoke and rubble.

We understand this loss, too. Maybe not a literal fire — but we know what it means to lose the place that felt safe. The house you could not keep after the divorce. The

apartment you had to leave when the finances collapsed. The childhood home your parents sold. The neighborhood you were priced out of. Or maybe it is not a building at all. Maybe it is the church you called home for so many years. Maybe it is the season of life that felt settled and stable — and now it is over, and you are standing in the smoke wondering where you belong.

The Psalmist understood this kind of displacement. Psalm 137 captures the ache of it: **“By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion.”** When the familiar place is gone, the grief is not just for the structure. It is for everything the structure represented — safety, belonging, and the life you built inside those walls.

That is the second layer removed. David has lost his position and now his home. But he still has his family. He still has his men. He still has himself.

David loses his family (30:2–5)

The burning was devastating. But the next detail is worse. Notice verse 2.

“And taken captive the women and all who were in it, both small and great.”

The Amalekites did not simply destroy the city. They took the people. Every wife, every child, every dependent left behind when the men marched north with the Philistine army — all of them carried off into captivity. The text specifies that they killed no one, which later becomes a crucial detail enabling the rescue. But in this moment, David does not know that. He does not know if they are alive or dead. He only knows that they are gone. **David loses his family.**

The narrator pauses to make it personal: **“David’s two wives also had been taken captive, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel.”** These are not anonymous victims. These are named women. Ahinoam, who had been with David since his early days as a fugitive. Abigail, the wise and discerning woman who had risked her life to prevent David from shedding blood in a moment of rage. The two people closest to David in all the world, the two names he would have spoken first in prayer, are gone.

Verse 3 gives us the moment of discovery: **“And when David and his men came to the city, they found it burned with fire, and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive.”** The verb “found” carries the weight of arrival without preparation. They came

expecting home. They found devastation. They came expecting the voices of children and the warmth of evening fires. They found silence and smoke.

This is the loss that cuts deepest, isn't it? You can recover from losing a job. You can find another house. But when the people you love are gone — that is a different kind of wound. Some of you have buried a spouse. Some of you have watched a marriage end. Some of you have a child who will not speak to you, and you do not know how to reach them. Some of you have a parent slipping into a fog of memory loss, and every visit feels like another goodbye. The faces that made your life feel full are absent, and the silence in the house is deafening.

David knew that silence. He stood in a burned city and looked at empty rooms where his family used to be. And the hardest part was the not knowing — the agonizing uncertainty of whether he would ever see them again.

That is the third layer removed. Position, home, family — gone. But he still has his men and himself. But then next, we see that . . .

David loses his composure (30:4)

“Then David and the people who were with him raised their voices and wept until they had no more strength to weep.”

This is one of the most physically vivid descriptions of grief in the Old Testament. The narrator does not say they wept bitterly, or that they wept for hours. He says they wept until their bodies could no longer produce the act of weeping. Their grief exhausted their physical capacity for grief. The Hebrew is striking — the same word for “strength” that will appear two verses later in verse 6 appears here to describe what has been depleted. They had *no more strength*. The very resource David will need to find in God has been completely depleted in the act of mourning.

This detail matters. David is not operating from a position of spiritual composure. He is not the calm, collected leader who rises above his circumstances with stoic faith. He weeps with his men. He weeps as hard as they do. He weeps until his body gives out. Whatever “strengthening himself in the Lord” looks like in verse 6, it does not begin from a posture of emotional stability. It begins from the floor.

Maybe you have been here. You know the exhaustion of grief that goes beyond tears. The diagnosis that empties you. The betrayal that takes the wind out of you so

completely that you cannot even pray. The season of suffering so long that your soul goes numb. You are not being dramatic. You are not being weak. Even David — the giant killer, the warrior poet, the man after God’s own heart — wept until his body shut down. Psalm 6 captures this place: **“I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping. My eye wastes away because of grief.”** God is not surprised by your exhaustion. He is not disappointed by your tears. The Psalm tells us He collects every one of them.

That is the fourth layer. Position, home, family, composure — all gone. But he still has his men. These 600 warriors have followed him through the wilderness of Ziph, the cave of Adullam, the deserts of En Gedi and Maon. They have shared his exile, his danger, his victories. They are the last human resource David possesses. Surely they will hold. Notice verse 6:

David loses his people (30:6a)

“And David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters.”

They did not hold. **David loses his friends.**

The same men who had wept beside David now turn their grief into blame. The text does not describe a formal mutiny or a reasoned accusation. It describes men who are “bitter in soul” — a phrase that conveys the kind of pain that curdles into rage because it has nowhere else to go. They have lost their children. Someone must be responsible. David led them away. David left their families unprotected. David is the reason they are standing in ashes.

The word “stoning” is not a metaphor. This is a death threat. These men are not grumbling or expressing frustration. They are discussing execution. David, the anointed future king of Israel, the man who killed Goliath, the leader who had protected and provided for these families for years — is now surrounded by men who want to kill him.

There is a particular cruelty to this loss. David had also lost his wives. David had also wept until he had no strength. David was grieving the same grief they were grieving. But grief deep enough does not always create solidarity — grief deep enough can create isolation. Each man was bitter in soul for *his* sons and daughters. Their pain was individual, not collective. And David became the target for all of it.

Some of you know this loss by name. The friend who walked away when your life got messy. The family member who chose sides in the conflict and did not choose yours. The church community that disappeared when you needed it most. The spouse who said, “I can’t do this anymore.” You were carrying the same pain they were carrying, but somehow you became the target for theirs. And the loneliness of that moment — grieving your own loss while being blamed for someone else’s — is unlike anything else in the world.

The Psalmist knew it. Psalm 55:12–14 says, “**For it is not an enemy who taunts me — then I could bear it. It is not an adversary who deals insolently with me — then I could hide from him. But it is you, a man, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend.**” The deepest wounds come from the people closest to us. And when those people turn, the isolation is total.

That is the fifth and final layer. Position, home, family, composure, people — all gone. Every source of human strength has been systematically, ruthlessly stripped away. There is no one left. There is nowhere to turn. David stands alone in the ashes of everything he once had.

The Pivot

And then the text pivots on a single word: *But*.

“But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.”

The narrator offers no explanation of how. No description of what David prayed. No account of a vision or a voice from heaven. No worship song, no sermon, no counselor. Just the bare, stunning statement that in the moment when every human resource was exhausted, David turned to the one resource that could not be taken, could not be burned, could not be exhausted, and would not turn against him.

What was the content of this strength? It was trust in God’s promise. David had been anointed king by Samuel. God had made a commitment — spoken through the prophet, confirmed through Jonathan, affirmed through years of providential deliverance — a covenant commitment that David would sit on the throne of Israel. If that promise was true, then Ziklag could not be the end of the story. If God had spoken, then 600 angry men could not overrule it. The promise became the floor beneath the collapsed floor.

Position — gone. Home — gone. Family — gone. Composure — gone. Friends — gone. The story has spent two chapters stripping David down to nothing. And it did it on purpose. Because the narrator wants us to see what is still standing when everything else has fallen. Some of you heard me describe those five losses and you did not have to imagine them. You remembered them. Because you've been there. What this story is teaching us, you already know in your bones. You see, there is a truth woven into the fabric of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation, and the narrator of 1 Samuel is pressing it into our hearts. It is not comfortable. But it is the most important thing you will hear today. Here it is:

Every believer will face a moment when God is the only source of strength left.

Not because God is cruel. Not because suffering is punishment. But because every other source of strength is finite. Positions can be revoked. Homes can burn. Families can be taken. Emotional reserves can be emptied. Even the most devoted friends can turn on you when their own pain is deep enough. None of these are bad things. Most of them are good gifts from God. But none of them are ultimate. And there will come a moment — perhaps only once or twice in a lifetime, perhaps without warning, perhaps partly through your own choices — when every secondary source gives way and you stand before God with nothing between you and Him.

Every believer will face a moment when God is the only source of strength left.

I want us to sit with that sentence for a moment. Every believer will face a moment when God is the only source of strength left. Some of you know exactly what that means because you are living in it right now. Some of you know because you have been there and the memory still takes your breath away. And some of you have not been there yet — but the biblical story and others around you are telling you it is coming. Not to scare you. To prepare you.

Because here is the thing about David's story. It does not end in the ashes. David's circumstances did not strip him of everything just to leave him there. The retelling of the story showed that David lost everything to show us what David found at the bottom. And what David found at the bottom is what we need to talk about for the rest of this morning.

We see that David strengthened himself in the Lord his God. That is the pivot. That is the turning point. But what does that actually look like? What happens inside that moment? What does a person discover when God is the only thing left standing?

That is the question before us.

What does a person discover when God is the only source of strength left?

I. You Discover That No Crisis Is Beyond God's Reach — Even Ones You Helped Create.

1 Samuel 29:1–11; 30:1–5

Another way to state it is this: your crisis may have your fingerprints on it, and God shows up anyway.

David's presence in the Philistine army was not an accident of fate. It was the direct result of a decision he made in chapter 27 without consulting God. He fled to Achish out of fear. He built an elaborate web of deception. He conducted secret raids while lying about his targets. He left no survivors so that no one could expose the lie. Every step took him further from God's guidance and deeper into a compromised life he could not sustain.

And the burning of Ziklag itself may have been connected to those choices. The Amalekites who burned David's city are the same people David had been raiding from Ziklag. His raids — conducted as part of his deception of Achish — may have provoked the very retaliation that destroyed his home. The text does not state this directly, but the connection is hard to miss. David's compromised choices in Philistia did not only create the crisis in chapter 29. They likely contributed to the crisis in chapter 30 as well.

So when David stands in the ashes of Ziklag, he is not standing in someone else's mess. He is standing in his own. The crisis has his fingerprints all over it.

And yet — God had already been working. Look at chapter 29 again. The Philistine commanders, without any knowledge of God's purposes, rejected David from the army and sent him home. They did not know they were instruments of providence. They thought they were protecting their military operation from a potential insider revolt.

But God used their suspicion to extract David from an impossible situation before it destroyed him. God was rescuing David before David even knew he needed rescuing.

The hidden providence is remarkable. God's name is barely mentioned in chapter 29. There is no theophany, no prophetic word, no miracle. Just pagan commanders making a pragmatic military decision — and behind that decision, the sovereign hand of God turning events to serve His purposes. As one writer observes, the working of God is clear in this chapter, though it is also hidden. Often His sovereign will is achieved in ways that are completely unseen.

One commentator captures it with beautiful simplicity: if David's move into Philistine territory had been a wrong one, God did not abandon him there. Far from it.

The apostle Paul understood this reality from the inside. He wrote in Romans 8:38–39, “**For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**”

Paul does not include in his list our own poor decisions, but he could have — because even our own failures cannot separate us from the love of God.

This is the first reality you discover when God is the only source of strength left. He is still there. Even when the mess has your fingerprints on it. Even when your crisis is the fruit of your own fear, your own compromise, your own failure to seek God when you should have. God's grace is not reserved for clean crises.

If you are in a crisis right now and you know — you know — that some of it is your fault, hear this: that does not disqualify you from God's reach.

So since no crisis is beyond God's reach, strengthen yourself in the Lord this week by honestly naming where you are — even the parts that are your fault — and bringing the whole mess to God in prayer. Do not try to clean it up first. Do not wait until you have a better story to tell. Come to Him now, as David did, standing in the ashes. The door is open. It has never been closed. This is the first reality.

But there is a second reality the text reveals, and this one is harder to hear. Because it is not about God's faithfulness — it is about the limits of everyone else's.

II. You Discover That Human Loyalty Has Limits That God's Faithfulness Does Not.

The second reality is painful and personal. The people closest to you have a breaking point.

To feel the force of this, you have to remember what David and these men had been through together. These were not casual followers. They were not fair-weather friends. They had come to David at the cave of Adullam when he was a fugitive with nothing to offer — everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, everyone who was bitter in soul. David took the outcasts and the broken and turned them into a family. They had followed him through the wilderness of Ziph, the deserts of Maon and En Gedi, the exile in Philistia. They had fought beside him, hidden with him, risked their lives alongside him for years. The bond between David and his men was forged in shared suffering over a very long period of time. This is not a group of strangers turning on a distant leader. This is a band of brothers turning on the man who made them brothers.

And that bond broke in a single afternoon.

The text says all the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters. The grief was not collective — it was individual. Each man consumed by his own loss, his own missing children, his own empty arms. Grief of this depth is isolating. It does not create solidarity; it fractures it. And the fracture needs a target. The men who would have died for David yesterday are talking about stoning him today. Nothing about David had changed. Everything about their circumstances had.

David's soldiers came close to murdering him in their initial distress — kind of like the Jerusalem crowds who shouted "Hosanna" on Palm Sunday and "Crucify him" a few days later. Human beings, especially in a crowd, become prisoners of the passions of the moment.

This is not cynicism. These men were not evil. They were in agony. But agony has a way of overriding loyalty, gratitude, history, and reason. The human heart under extreme pressure does not always behave the way it would under normal conditions. Your spouse, your closest friends, your most devoted community — all of them have a threshold beyond which their own pain will consume their capacity to support yours.

This reality strips away a subtle idol many of us carry — the belief that human relationships, if strong enough, will sustain us through anything. They often will. But there comes a moment when even the best human loyalty buckles under the weight of pain.

Notice the narrator's language in verse 6: David strengthened himself in **“the Lord his God.”** Not “the Lord” generically. *“His God.”* The possessive is deliberate. It emphasizes the personal, covenant relationship between David and the Lord. God has always been “with” David — since the day Samuel poured oil over a shepherd boy's head in his father's house. And in the moment when no one else is with him, the narrator reminds us: God still is.

Psalm 27:10 says it plainly: **“For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me in.”** And Hebrews 13:5 carries the promise into the New Covenant: **“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”** The word “never” in that verse is emphatic in the Greek — it is a double negative, the strongest denial the language can produce. God is saying, “I will not, I will not, I will not ever leave you.” Human loyalty says “I will try not to leave.” God's faithfulness says “I will not leave.” And He means it.

God's faithfulness is not contingent on David's circumstances, David's performance, or David's men's emotional state. It is rooted in God's own character and God's own promise. That promise did not waver when Ziklag burned. It did not waver when 600 men reached for stones. It does not waver when your support system collapses under the weight of a crisis no one was built to carry.

If you are in that place today — if the people you counted on have reached their limit, if the community you trusted has fractured, if you feel more alone than you have ever felt — hear this: human loyalty has limits. God's faithfulness does not. And the moment you discover the difference is the moment your faith stops being theoretical and starts being the realest thing you have ever experienced.

So since human loyalty has limits that God's faithfulness does not, strengthen yourself in the Lord this week by anchoring your identity in His promise rather than in people's opinions. Go back to what God has said about you in His word. Write it down. Carry it with you. When the voices around you shift — and they will — you need a voice underneath those voices that does not change. Let God's word be that voice.

The first reality tells us that God’s reach is not limited by our failures. The second tells us that His faithfulness is not limited by other people’s. But there is a third reality — and this one confronts us with a choice.

III. You Discover That the Most Important Decision in Any Crisis Is Where You Turn for Strength

1 Samuel 30:6b; cf. 28:6–7, 15–20

The third reality is the hinge of the whole story. It is about a decision — the most important one any person will ever make in their darkest moment.

The narrator of 1 Samuel has been building a parallel between David and Saul across chapters 28 through 30, and the parallel reaches its climax right here. Two men. Same language of distress. Same desperate need. Opposite directions. Opposite outcomes.

In chapter 28, Saul faces the Philistine army and is terrified. He inquires of the Lord, but God does not answer. The silence drives him to a medium at Endor. When God would not speak to him through the channels God had ordained, Saul went looking for a voice outside of God’s authority — and he found one. The spirit of Samuel delivers God’s final word: the kingdom is gone, and tomorrow Saul and his sons will die. Saul’s response is total collapse — full length on the ground, filled with fear, “no strength in him.”

In chapter 30, David faces the destruction of Ziklag and the threat of his own men. He is “greatly distressed” — language that deliberately echoes Saul’s own words in chapter 28: “I am in great distress.” The narrator is placing both men in the same emotional territory. Both are at the absolute bottom. Both need help beyond their own resources.

But here is where the stories diverge.

Saul turned to the forbidden and received the promise of death. David turned to God and received the promise of life. Both men were probably seeking supernatural guidance on the very same day. However, one defied the Torah while the other utilized its gracious provision. Saul sought help from a medium and received the promise of death. David sought help through an Aaronic priest using the ephod and received the promise — later fulfilled — of life and blessing.

Same day. Same desperation. Same need for a word from beyond themselves. Two completely different directions. Two completely different outcomes.

Saul's turning produced information without hope. He learned the truth about his situation, but the truth brought no strength, no direction, no mercy. He left Endor with a death sentence and "no strength in him." His crisis did not define him. His direction defined him. He turned toward darkness, and darkness is what he found.

David's turning produced something entirely different. He strengthened himself in the Lord — the Hebrew is reflexive, indicating deliberate, volitional action. David did not passively receive comfort. He actively took hold of God. He grabbed the promise and refused to let go. He found strength again in the one who had promised that he would be king over Israel. The strength David found was trust in God's promise. It was what we call faith. And then that faith produced action — he called for Abiathar the priest and the ephod, and he inquired of the Lord with a specific question: "Shall I pursue after this band? Shall I overtake them?"

And God answered. Immediately. Specifically. Emphatically. God gave David clear direction and an unshakeable promise of success. Where Saul received the certainty of death, David received the certainty of deliverance. Same day. Same God. Different directions. Different outcomes.

The crisis did not define David. The direction he turned defined him. And the direction you turn will define you.

When your world collapses — and the text is telling us it will — you will reach for something. Every human being does. We are wired to seek relief, to grasp for something that will stop the pain. The question is not whether you will reach, but where. Will you reach for the bottle, the affair, the revenge, the bitter isolation, the numbing scroll through your phone at 2 a.m.? Or will you reach for the God who has promised never to leave you or forsake you?

Proverbs 3:5–6 has never been more relevant than in a Ziklag moment: **"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."** In all your ways. Not just the easy ones. Not just the ones where the path is visible. In the Ziklag ways. In the burned-down, wept-out, turned-on ways. Acknowledge Him there, and He will direct your next step.

I want to be honest with you about something. The text does not tell us that David felt strong after verse 6b. It does not say he felt peaceful or confident or emotionally restored. It simply says he strengthened himself in the Lord and then took action. The decision to turn toward God in a Ziklag moment may not feel like strength. It may feel like nothing more than a refusal to let go of the last thing left. It may feel like whispering a prayer through clenched teeth while your body still shakes with grief. But the text calls it strength. And the outcome validates it.

The most important decision in any crisis is not how you feel. It is where you turn.

So, strengthen yourself in the Lord this week by building the habits now that will hold you then. Open the Scriptures before the crisis comes. Pray before the floor collapses. Build a history with God in the ordinary days so that when the extraordinary day arrives, turning to Him is not a new skill — it is a reflex. David could strengthen himself in the Lord at Ziklag because he had been strengthening himself in the Lord for years before Ziklag. The Psalms he wrote in the wilderness, the prayers he prayed in the caves, the promises he memorized on the run — all of that was infrastructure built before the fire. Build yours now.

Conclusion

Every believer will face a moment when God is the only source of strength left.

I do not say that to frighten you. I say it to prepare you. And more than that, I say it to redirect you — because the emphasis of this text is not on the severity of the crisis. It is on the sufficiency of God in the crisis.

We have walked through the narrowing together this morning. We have watched everything stripped from David — his position, his home, his family, his composure, his people. And at the bottom of that narrowing, we discovered three realities that every believer needs to know before the crisis comes.

First, no crisis is beyond God's reach — even one you helped create. Your worst decisions do not put you outside the range of God's providence. The same God who worked through pagan commanders to rescue David from the Philistine army is working in your circumstances right now, in ways you cannot see, turning events you

did not plan toward purposes you could not imagine. Your mess does not disqualify you. His grace is bigger than your failure.

Second, human loyalty has limits that God's faithfulness does not. The people you love are real gifts from God, and most of the time they will stand with you. But they are not ultimate. They are not infinite. They will reach the end of what they can carry. And when they do, it is not because they are bad people. It is because they are human people. God alone has no breaking point. His promise does not bend under pressure. His faithfulness does not run out when yours does.

Third, the most important decision in any crisis is where you turn for strength. Not what you feel. Not what you see. Not what makes sense in the moment. Where you turn. David and Saul stood at the same crossroads on the same day with the same desperation. One turned toward God and found life. One turned away and found death. The decision is that simple — and that consequential.

Some of you are in a Ziklag moment right now. Your world has collapsed. The people you counted on have reached their limit. You are staring at ashes and you know that some of them are your own doing. You have wept until you have no strength to weep.

And some of you are not in that moment yet. But the text says it is coming. Not to punish you. Not because God is distant. But because He wants you to discover something that you can only discover when everything else is gone: that He alone is enough. That His promise holds. That His faithfulness has no breaking point.

Paul said it this way in 2 Corinthians 1:8–9: **“We were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.”** Paul — the apostle, the church planter, the man who had seen the risen Christ — was pushed to the point of despair so that he would stop relying on himself and start relying on God.

That is the gift hidden inside the crisis. Not the crisis itself — but what the crisis reveals. When everything else is stripped away, you find out whether the foundation holds. And if your foundation is God — His character, His promise, His faithfulness — then it will hold. It held for David. It held for Paul. It will hold for you.

David strengthened himself in the Lord his God. That is what he did. Not because he was strong. Not because he had a plan. Not because he could see the way forward. But

because he knew who God was, and he knew what God had promised. And he refused to let go.

The question is not whether your Ziklag moment will come. The question is whether you will be ready when it does. Whether you have built a relationship with God that can bear the weight. Whether you have settled what you believe before the fire comes.

May you turn, as David did, to the Lord your God. And may you find, as David did, that when He is all you have left, He is all you need.

Let us pray:

Father, we come to You the way David did — emptied out and holding on. Some of us are standing in ashes this morning. Meet us there. Strengthen us in You alone. Teach us to turn to You before we turn to anything else. And when we do, may we find that You are enough. Amen.

Go in peace this week, knowing that the God who met David in the ashes has promised never to leave you. He is enough. Now and always.